

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-25

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C O N F I D E N T I A L VIENNA 8381

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PGOV, PINT, AU

SUBJECT: PROVINCIAL ELECTIONS IN AUSTRIA

1. SUMMARY: PROVINCIAL ELECTIONS IN VIENNA AND UPPER AUSTRIA, SCHEDULED FOR OCTOBER 21, ARE BEING TERMED TEST VOTE ON SOCIALIST PARTY'S FEDERAL GOVERNMENT STEWARDSHIP HALFWAY THROUGH PERIOD OF OFFICE. MAJOR SHIFTS IN VOTING PATTERN COULD HAVE IMPORTANT IMPACT ON TREND FOR 1975 NATIONAL ELECTIONS. OUTLOOK AT MOMENT IS FOR MINOR SHIFT IN COMPOSITION OF POLITICAL SPECTRUM AMONG THREE PARTIES NOW HOLDING SEATS IN LEGISLATIVE BODIES IN TWO PROVINCIAL CAPITALS. END SUMMARY.

2. PROVINCIAL ELECTIONS, INVOLVING ABOUT TWO MILLION VOTERS, OR ABOUT 40 PERCENT OF AUSTRIAN ELECTORATES, WILL BE HELD IN VIENNA AND UPPER AUSTRIA ON OCTOBER 21. ELECTION OUTCOME IS OF MORE THAN LOCAL SIGNIFICANCE; BOTH SOCIALIST PARTY AND MAJOR CONSERVATIVE OPPOSITION PARTY, PEOPLE'S PARTY, ARE DESCRIBING ELECTION OUTCOME AS TEST VOTE ON KREISKY'S STEWARDSHIP AS CHANCELLOR. FREEDOM PARTY, SMALL RIGHT-WING PARTY, IS SEEKING TO OFFER ITSELF AS VIABLE ALTERNATIVE TO THE MAJOR PARTIES WHILE SEVERAL

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MINISCULE PARTIES, INCLUDING KPOE, ARE IN CAMPAIGN

WITHOUT MUCH HOPE FOR SUCCESS.

3. VICTORY FOR SOCIALISTS WOULD HAVE GREAT PSYCHOLOGICAL VALUE; IT WOULD HALT RECENT SOCIALIST PARTY ELECTION REVERSES AT MUNICIPAL LEVEL, FOLLOWING IN WAKE OF MAJOR SOCIALIST VICTORY IN 1971 OF WINNING ABSOLUTE MAJORITY OF SEATS IN NATIONAL ASSEMBLY. CONVERSELY, MAJOR GAINS AT POLLS BY PEOPLE'S PARTY WOULD STRONGLY SUGGEST THAT ELECTORATE SUPPORT OF SOCIALISTS WOULD CONTINUE TO ERODE IN NEXT ROUND OF PROVINCIAL ELECTIONS IN 1974 AND MIGHT RESULT IN OUSTER OF SOCIALIST PARTY FROM FEDERAL GOVERNMENT IN NATIONAL ELECTIONS IN 1975.

4. IN VIEW OF STAKES INVOLVED, SOCIALISTS HAVE IN RECENT WEEKS THROWN INTO ELECTION CAMPAIGN THEIR TOP TEAM, INCLUDING KREISKY, IN EFFORT TO OVERCOME INITIALLY UNSATISFACTORY STARTING POSITION. IN VIENNA, WHERE SOCIALISTS HAVE RULED FOR OVER FIFTY YEARS, PARTY IS JUST GETTING OVER PURGING ITS MAYOR IN WAKE OF ADVERSE OUTCOME IN REFERENDUM ON QUALITY OF LIFE ISSUE AND REPLACING HIM WITH YOUNGER, MORE DYNAMIC PARTY LEADER (GRATZ), CLOSE KREISKY SUPPORTER. IN UPPER AUSTRIA, TWO SOCIALIST PARTY BARONS, FRIEDL AND HILLINGER, HAVE BEEN AT LOGGERHEADS OVER THEIR PRIMARY ROLE IN PARTY LEADERSHIP.

5. PEOPLE'S PARTY, WHICH HAS CONTROLLED UPPER AUSTRIA FOR 28 YEARS, HAS ATTRACTIVE CANDIDATE (WENZL) HEADING ITS LIST IN UPPER AUSTRIA. IN VIENNA, A SOCIALIST STRONGHOLD SINCE END OF WORLD WAR I, IT SUFFERS FROM OBVIOUS SOCIALIST PREPONDERANCE AND PSYCHOLOGICAL PROBLEMS RESULTING FROM THIS SITUATION IN GETTING ATTRACTIVE CANDIDATES TO RUN. AS CONSERVATIVE PARTY, IT IS ALSO HAVING DIFFICULTY ARTICULATING CLEAR ALTERNATIVE TO SOCIALIST PROGRAM OF PROMISES OF MORE ECONOMIC WELL-BEING AND INCREASED SOCIAL WELFARE SERVICES.

6. SOCIALISTS ARE RUNNING IN EFFECT ON THEIR FEDERAL GOVERNMENT PROGRAM OF RADIO/TV REFORM (MORE POLITICAL CONTROL OVER BROADCASTING MEDIA), CRIMINAL CODE

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REFORM (INCLUDING LEGALIZING ABORTION), INTRODUCTION OF OMSBUDSMEN CONCEPT, PROMISE OF MORE SOCIAL WELFARE OUTLAYS, AND CONTINUATION OF FULL EMPLOYMENT UNDER ECONOMIC BOOM CONDITIONS. RIGHT OF CENTRAL PARTIES, PARTICULARLY PEOPLE'S PARTY, HAVE SOUGHT TO FOCUS POPULAR ATTENTION ON AN INCREASED DISSATISFACTION OVER CONTINUING INFLATION, HIGH COST OF GOVERNMENT ADMINISTRATION, HIGH TAXES, EXCESSIVE HIGH COSTS FOR

CONSTRUCTION OF UN CITY IN VIENNA AND, MORE PHILOSOPHICALLY,
OVER EXTENSIVE GOVERNMENT INTERFERENCE IN LIVES OF
CITIZENRY.

7. KREISKY'S HANDLING OF ARAB TERRORIST INCIDENT AT
VIENNA AIRPORT AND DECISION TO CLOSE SCHOENAU TRANSIT
CAMP HAS BECOME DIVISIVE ISSUE IN ELECTION CAMPAIGN.
HE HAS CLEVERLY MANIPULATED DOMESTIC PUBLIC OPINION SO AS
TO CAST HIMSELF IN PATRIOTIC ROLE OF SUCCESSFULLY WITH-
STANDING STRONG ISRAELI PRESSURES AND PROTECTING WHAT ARE
DESCRIBED AS AUSTRIAN NATIONAL INTERESTS. LEADERS OF
OPPOSITION PARTIES, PEOPLE'S PARTY AND FREEDOM PARTY,
WHICH ORIGINALLY WERE HIGHLY CRITICAL OF KREISKY'S HANDLING
OF INCIDENT HAVE FOUND THEMSELVES OUT OF STEP WITH THEIR
OWN RANK AND FILE, A DEVELOPMENT WHICH COULD COST THEM
VOTES ON ELECTION DAY.

8. ALL THREE MAJOR PARTIES HAVE MADE CAUTIOUS VICTORY
FORECASTS. OUTLOOK AT THIS JUNCTURE, TEN DAYS BEFORE
ELECTIONS, IS THAT NO MAJOR SHIFT EITHER TO RIGHT OR LEFT
SEEMS TO BE IN OFFING. SOCIALIST ANTICIPATE MINOR LOSSES
IN VIENNA AND MINOR GAINS IN UPPER AUSTRIA. PEOPLE'S
PARTY EXPECTS TO MAINTAIN STATUS QUO POSITION IN
UPPER AUSTRIA AND HOPES TO PICK UP SEAT OR TWO IN
VIENNA. FREEDOM PARTY ANTICIPATES MINOR GAINS IN
UPPER AUSTRIA, WHILE MINISCULE PARTIES (COMMUNISTS
AND OLAH'S DFP IN VIENNA) ARE NOT EXPECTED TO WIN
FIVE PERCENT OF VOTE NEEDED TO GAIN BASIC MANDATE.MOWINCKEL

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